

# *Losing a Grandchild to SIDS*

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The loss of a family member is painful, and the loss of an infant or young child is especially so. As a grandparent, you face a double blow—you have lost a much loved grandchild, and you are confronted with the pain of your own adult child.

The relationship between grandparent and grandchild is a very special one. Grandchildren represent the future, the carrying on of generations. Being a grandparent is different from being a parent of course, but, once again you are involved with a new life, and all its attendant challenges and satisfactions. As with your own children, you have hopes and dreams for the future of your grandchild.

The sudden death of an infant means an abrupt severing of these fantasies and plans. The light goes out on all the images which now can never materialize.

Grandparents often feel helpless in the face of their own children's grief. Perhaps you were able to "make it stop hurting" when your children brought home the skinned knees and injured feelings of childhood and adolescence. Unfortunately, there is no way to stop the pain of bereavement.

This does not mean that you are not a valuable resource to your son or daughter. Bereaved parents often say that their own parents were primary sources of support - by listening, by being available, by sharing memories and feelings. Perhaps you could sit down with your son or daughter and talk together about the baby, about the death, about the feelings of guilt, anger and loss which are inevitable when an infant dies. Some people find it hard to talk this way, but it is probably easiest to deal with people with whom you have a long history of love and trust.

Grandparents come in a variety of ages, but it sometimes happens that the age of grandparenting is also the time when one begins to face anticipated or real losses in life. An adult child may take a job in another state or another country. Friends may begin to retire or move away. Possibilities for the future may become or seem to become more limited. At a time like this, the birth of a baby is a wonderful affirmation of life. The death of a baby, a devastating blow at any time, becomes even more so when it is experienced in the midst of other losses.

Your feelings of sadness and grief are very real. Some grandparents say, "but my daughter was the mother. She had the real loss." Remember that the baby was an extension of you, the object of your love, a hope for your tomorrow. In a SIDS death, everyone involved with the baby is affected by his/her death. Mourning experience may be different, depending on personality, history, circumstances, relationship to the infant, but they are all valid.